



Representative

Hans Dunshee

District 39

Pipeline safety first, not profits

Human lives deserve more protection than the bottom line of a corporation.

That's the choice we're facing right now. The corporation that runs the Olympic pipeline — which blew up in Bellingham last year, killing two boys and a young man — are complaining about legislation to make the pipeline safer.

This issue is important for two reasons:

1. The Olympic pipeline is running again.
2. Pipelines are everywhere, running beneath playgrounds, our backyards, our parks. The fireball in Bellingham could happen anywhere.

Your right to know

My hat is off to the Williams Company for sharing information, but they are still not quite willing to share all information.

I am pressing them to share the raw data about tests and maintenance. They claim the truth might scare us because of our lack of technical knowledge. I may not understand, but I want any citizen to know they have access to all the information. If they want to understand, they can learn.

When did a pipeline last cause injuries or death? June 10, 2000 in Bellingham, when a pipeline fireball killed 10-year-olds Wade King and Stephen Tsiorvas along with 18-year-old Liam Wood.

Since 1986, there've been 5,700 pipeline accidents, killing 325 people, injuring 1,500 and releasing 6 million gallons of hazardous liquids into the environment.

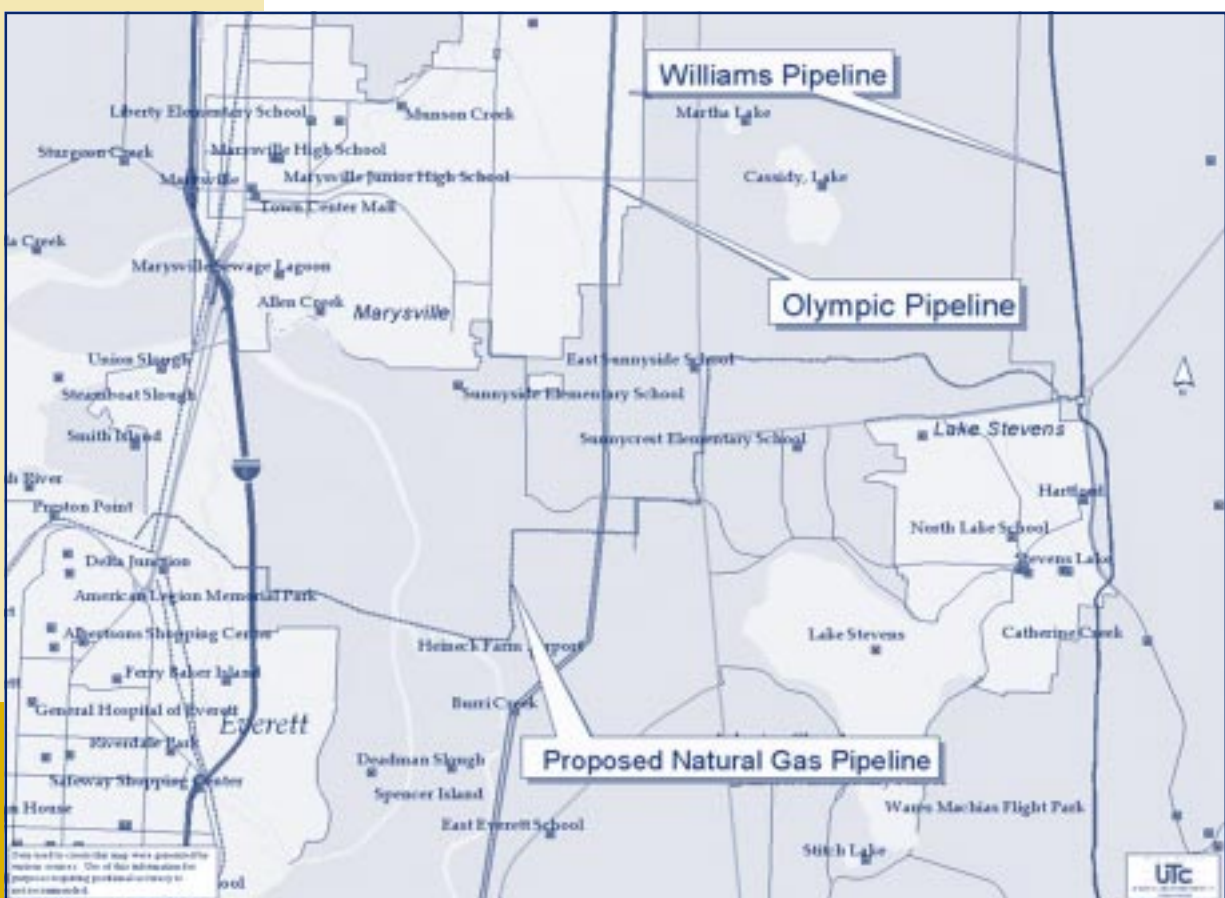
I'd hoped that the outrage of those boys families and the need for safety would make pipeline corporations change their ways. They made some decent moves at first to improve safety. Yet their recent desire for secrecy does nothing to repair their reputation with the citizens. A sixteen inch pipeline is hard to hide, especially when there's supposed to be signs everywhere telling people not to dig with a shovel or

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Committees:

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Phone numbers and
Website Information

State Utilities and
Transportation Commission:

www.wutc.wa.gov
800-562-6150

Federal Office of
Pipeline Safety:
<http://ops.dot.gov>

Olympic Pipeline Company:
www.olympipeline.com

The Planet
(magazine issue about
the pipeline explosion):
[http://planet.wvu.edu/
archives/summer2000/
skye/index.html](http://planet.wvu.edu/archives/summer2000/skye/index.html)

Fuel Safe Washington:
www.fuelsafewashington.org

backhoe and rupture the line.

Citizens should have full access to information about the pipelines in their neighborhoods, every ding, wart, sticky valve and inspection report. That's the only way to rebuild public confidence in the safety of the pipeline. Nothing less is acceptable.

Safety inspectors vs. profits

In House committee hearings, lobbyists for BP and the Williams Company have whined about the cost of a new inspection program to prevent future Bellingham-like disasters. They're complaining about paying for four inspectors and saying the costs will be passed on to consumers.

Four inspectors is the minimum we think to keep a big pipeline like this safe. And four people working on safety is only one more than the three dead in Bellingham.

Are three lives worth four inspectors?

The state estimates it would cost 4 cents a year per average customer of the Williams Company for their natural gas pipeline. I'd pay that to keep our families safe. My neighbors would. In fact, we taxpayers already footed the bill.

Last year, the Legislature used tax dollars to start a safety program to get it up and running. Taxpayers don't deserve to be stuck with the bill any longer. From now on, the companies that run pipelines should be responsible for running a safe operation, just like your or I are responsible if we cause a traffic accident.

Senate Bill 5182 would make pipeline corporations, not taxpayers, pay for the safety inspectors. By how the pipeline lobbyists have whined, this bill won't pass without a fight. They've complained and complained about the cost of the new safety program, which breaks down to \$150,000 for Olympic's pipelines and \$310,000 for the Williams pipeline.

This is absurd. If you look at their stockholder reports, Williams made a profit of \$741 million just on transport fees for others to use their pipeline system. That doesn't include profits they made from actually selling whatever goes through those pipelines.

I strongly believe taxpayers have paid enough, and the pipeline corporations could — and should — pay for safety inspectors.

If you care about this issue, it's important that your voice be heard. Call your lawmakers at 1-800-562-6000 and tell them what you think about this issue.

Let's err on the side of safety. Citizens have a right to know about pipelines in their neighborhoods, and it's only fair that corporations help pay for inspectors to make sure their pipelines don't leak or explode.

Rep. Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, co-chairs the Local Government and Housing Committee. He is a small business owner and served as a volunteer firefighter.